EC&I 809 Reading Response #3 – Chapters 3 & 4

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**What are some of the different conceptions of program evaluation?**

* Range from comprehensive prescriptions to checklists of suggestions
* Process of identifying and collecting information to assist decision makers
* Professional judgment – experts’ opinions and decisions lead to a judgment on program quality
* Process of comparing performance data with clearly specified objectives
* Carefully controlled experimental research on programs

**What are the origins of alternative views of evaluation?**

* 4 sources of thoughts on evaluation: experimentation (social science experimental research), measurement (presumes that the use of a behavioral measurement device will produce information about program effectiveness), systems analysis (examination of the interrelationships between broad sets of variables), interpretative approaches (creating holistic descriptive interpretations and judgments)
* Experimental and “interpretative approaches” = methods of collecting and interpreting empirical data
* Systems analysis = method for collecting and using empirical data to improve decision making

**What are some philosophical and ideological differences of evaluation?**

* Objectivism – evaluation information is “scientifically objective” - externalized
  + Uses data collection and analysis techniques which yields reproducible and verifiable results
* Subjectivism – validity based on “appeal to experience rather than to scientific method” - internalized
  + Knowledge is tacit rather than explicit and depends on the relevance of the evaluator’s background and qualifications
* Parallel to these methods are utilitarian versus intuitionist-pluralist evaluation (distinction concerning principles for assigning value – not epistemology)
* Utilitarian – determine value by assessing the overall impact of the program on those affected - follows objectivist epistemology
  + Focuses on total group gains – greatest good which will benefit the greatest number of individuals (Ex. Group averages on statewide assessments, large scale comparative evaluations on welfare systems)
  + Objectives-oriented and management-oriented approaches to evaluation
* Intuitionist – Pluralist – based on the idea that value depends on the impact on each individual affected by the program - follows subjectivist epistemology
  + Focuses on individual – “greatest good requires attention to each individual’s benefit” (Ex. Data may include: test scores, hours of training needed, changes in income)
  + Try to involve all individuals and groups affected by the program as “judges” rather than leave decisions and judgments to governmental sponsors or administrators
  + Ex. Naturalistic and Participant-oriented approach to evaluation
* Few evaluators who succeed in a wide range of evaluation settings can afford to consider philosophical ideologies as “either-or” decisions

**What are some practical considerations for evaluators to make?**

* Disagreement of whether evaluation is to render a value judgment (some only look for the usefulness of the evaluation for decision makers)
* Differing views of the political roles of evaluation
* Prior experiences of the evaluators
* Differing viewpoints as to who should conduct the evaluation and the nature of the expertise that the evaluator must possess
* Differing perceptions of whether it is desirable to have a wide variety of approaches to evaluation
* Different environmental contexts have different audiences (ex. Local stakeholders, corporate executives, federal legislators)
* Different audiences struggle with different budget concerns, client needs, stakeholder interests, employee and management concerns
* Must learn to identify what is useful in each approach when faced with specific evaluation needs, use them wisely and not be distracted by irrelevant approaches

**What is the objectives-oriented evaluation approach and who led to its development?**

* Follows a procedure of letting the achievement of objectives determine success or failure and justify improvements, maintenance or termination of the program/activity
* Primarily developed for the education system to examine school accountability and competency
* Greatest strength – simple (can be easily understood, followed and implemented and produces relevant information)
* Tylerian Evaluation Approach – evaluation is a process of determining the extent to which objectives of a program are being reached
  + Uses discrepancies between expected and actual observations to provide suggestions for program improvement or termination
* Before employing the objectives-oriented approach, the goals or objectives of a program can be evaluated using:
  + Logical methods: examining rationale behind objectives, consequences (utility and feasibility), considering higher-order values (laws, policies)
  + Empirical methods: collecting group data to describe judgments, arranging for experts, hearings or panels to review and evaluate, conducting content studies of archival records, conducting a pilot study
* Metfessal and Micheal’s Evaluation Paradigm – early approach heavily influenced by the Tylerian method
  + 8 steps: involve stakeholders, formulate a cohesive model, translate specific objectives, select evaluation instruments, carry our periodic observations, analyze data, interpret, develop recommendations
* Provus’s Discrepancy Evaluation Model – followed in the Tylerian method
  + Viewed evaluation as a continuous information-management process to identify discrepancies
  + 4 developmental stages of program development and evaluation: *definition* (defining goals or processes), *installation* (perform tests to identify discrepancies between expected and actual), *process* (gathering data to look for behavioral change), *product* (determining achievement of immediate outcomes and long-term outcomes, *cost-benefit analysis* (optional– has become almost essential with today’s scarcity of funding)
* Limitations/Criticisms: lacks a real evaluative component and standards to judge discrepancies, ignores alternatives, neglects context of evaluation, ignores other outcomes not necessary for the objectives, objectives do not always match for those involved in the process, evaluators may not be equipped by experience or training
* Criticisms and limitations has led to Scriven developing the idea of “Goal-Free Evaluation” – Goal was to reduce bias and increase objectivity, to identify actual outcomes achieved rather than focus on intended objectives (tunnel vision)

**Part II - Reflection**

Although I can see the positives of the objectives-oriented approach to evaluation, as a classroom teacher I can definitely see the pitfalls of the approach as well. There are definitely limitations when I administer assessments such as the AFL or CAT tests in the classroom. With the ever changing environments, it is difficult at times to see the reason for these consistent evaluations if there isn’t consistency of who is involved in the evaluations. Therefore, I have to agree with the author when he states that “competency testing invariably turns into *minimum* competency testing when expectations for achievement become bounded by test content.” (p. 84) If the context of how and when students are being assessed is not addressed, there may not be the results seen that are expected. In my situation, they may not yet have even been taught the material for which they are being assessed.

I know that a large attempt in the development of the AFL in math has been to ensure they are free of biases and currently teaching in a predominantly Caucasian middle-class environment, I don’t see that on these tests. However, having taken part in a standard setting session last month, I was surprised to see the perspectives from others and what we take for commonplace are not so with other cultures. In this discussion we were looking at an integer question that was asked in the context of a football field and gains and losses of yardage. As an evaluator, what impact do those biases have? How much do they influence perceived achievement?

Another example of these objective-oriented evaluations is departmental exams. Although all content is based on curricula individual input from those affected by it is not considered. This leads a lot of beginning or non-accredited teacher to “teach for the test”. Students may not be tested in a format they are familiar with. Is that the best for the students involved? Objective-oriented and goal-free evaluation need to be connected in evaluations. Evaluators should be able to assess the situation or program and have defined goals or objectives, but have the flexibility to expand to new ones that may come up.

I see evidence of Provus’ five stages of evaluation in our both our school’s renewal plan and school improvement plans. In today’s society, stage five – cost-benefit analysis is quite prevalent. In order to receive government funding for our school, we are set to become a grades seven to twelve school, rather that grades ten to twelve, in a couple of years. As a teacher at the high school level I have many questions about how this will unfold for us. One big question for me is will all those affected by the change be in agreement of the objectives and to what extent will everyone be involved?